INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

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Quality Curriculum and School Systems

Widening the Lens of Student Engagement

Inside this Issue:

by Kristin Grayson, M.Ed.

Student engagement that promotes access to curriculum is at the core of educational equity. The *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the Supreme Court ruling in *Lau vs. Nichols* in 1974 are just two examples of directives that address educational equity.

In 1974, the Supreme Court stated: "Providing students the same desks, books, teachers and curriculum did not ensure that they had equal educational opportunity" (*Lau vs. Nichols*, U.S. Supreme Court, 1974).

Schools must adapt the curriculum to fit the needs of diverse students so that all students succeed academically. Schools are accountable for educating *all* learners to high academic standards and outcomes regardless of differing characteristics of those learners.

Engaging students in instruction helps give them access to the curriculum. It also consistently correlates to higher student achievement (Sciarra and Seirup, 2008). Thus, there are good strategies for teachers to use at the classroom level to engage students (see "The Fourth Grade Slump and Math Achievement" in the last issue of the *IDRA Newsletter* for example).

But, student engagement cannot happen only at the classroom level. It also has to happen at the broader school or system level. Commenting on the high number of students that schools lose to attrition, Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA's President and CEO, stated recently that "since this problem is systemic, the solution must address schools as systems" (2008). A focus on student engagement at the systems level is one lens through which we can view the issue of access to a quality curriculum.

A useful guide is the Six Goals of Educational Equity, developed by IDRA's South Central Collaborative for Equity. The six goals are: comparably high academic achievement and other student outcomes, equitable access and inclusion, equitable treatment, equitable opportunity to learn, equitable resources, and accountability. With the vision of all students succeeding in schools, the goals of educational equity can be facilitated by studying research on the broad concept of student engagement.

This article reports on some of the latest findings research has

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to offer about student engagement at an organizational level and about strategies that schools and/or school districts can use.

The report on the High School Survey of Student Engagement describes a study of 81,449 students from 100 schools in 26 states (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). The researcher describes student engagement as "the student's relationship with the school community: the people (adult and peers), the structures (rules, facilities, schedules), the curriculum and content, the pedagogy, and the opportunities (curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular)… the degree to which a student is 'engaged' in school is dependent on the quality, depth and breadth of the student's relationship with these various aspects of the life and the work of the school."

These areas are then measured in the study in the broader categories of cognitive, social and emotional engagement. Findings show that, generally, girls self-report as being more engaged than boys, White students and Asian American students are more engaged than other races across all three dimensions, students in advanced classes are more engaged, non-low-income students report more engagement, and students who begin and stay at their high school starting in the ninth grade are higher across the dimensions of engagement.

Schools must adapt the curriculum to fit the needs of diverse students so that all students succeed academically.

James Connell and Adena Klem report on a framework for secondary school reform and describe systemic strategies in addition to instructional approaches that promote student engagement (2004). These practices build and strengthen each student's relationship with one or more specific adults in the school who support and advocate for the student and his or her family. Significant school adults also provide for "continuity of care" by being involved with the student throughout several years of the student's education. Small learning communities are recommended as a way to build systemwide student engagement. Teachers who are part of the student support system above are the core teachers for the student's academic work throughout their school years.

This framework was developed following previous research by Klem and Connell where they describe this support by teachers in the overall system of the school as critical to the students' ongoing engagement and their engagement as a reaction to challenge (2004). *Ongoing student engagement* is defined as having behavioral (effort, on-task, concentration), emotional (motivation), and cognitive dimensions. Student engagement as a *reaction to challenge* is the optimism and motivation that they can overcome difficult obstacles as opposed to being

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In This Issue...

The Intercultural Development Research Association *(IDRA)* is a non-profit organization with a 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. The purpose of the organization is to disseminate information concerning equality of educational opportunity.

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Integrating Technology for Quality Curriculum

Moving from a WIBCI (Wouldn't It Be Cool If) Mentality to a SAWr (Students Are World-ready) Reality –

Widening the Lens of Student Engagement

by Kathryn Brown

Wouldn't it be cool if… you walked into a science class where students were co-designing a natural habitat using three-dimensional virtual tools for a multitude of marine species, collaborating via web cams with experts from the Monterey Bay Aquarium, New England Aquarium and Georgia Aquarium? And what if they were communicating their innovative and progressive thinking via the web to other students across the world about a habitat that supported the education and research of marine-life?

Wouldn't it be cool if… you walked into the math classroom next door and students were contributing to Google Earth's "Cities in Development" galleries, creating realistic and well-constructed three-dimensional, textured models to build a futuristic city or one of hundreds of cities and locations around the world that anyone could "visit" at anytime? And during their learning experiences, what if they kept in touch with their parents by telling them what they were doing through Twitter or sending an e-mail through their cell phones using Jott? Parents wouldn't need to ask their children what they learned that day. Conversations at the dinner table would be kicked up to the next level to how they applied what they learned and how they created intricate and innovative solutions to awesome problems.

To be innovative, one has to implement a creative idea that is focused on the goals. This means taking a risk and having the creative space and the leadership support to take these risks in a classroom.

Students in both of these classrooms would understand the content in the deepest, truest sense. The students in the mathematics classroom would have a complete understanding of "three-dimensional geometric figures and related two-dimensional representations and use these representations to solve problems" (Texas Education Agency, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills in Geometry) as well as environmental science and geography.

Students in the science classroom would have a complete understanding of habitats, ecosystems and their interrelationships. This type of interaction would enable students to make justifiable recommendations that restore life in a natural habitat.

What if we merged these two content areas – math and science – that are often taught in isolation, where students could define problems in our environment and use mathematics, science and technology to engineer innovative solutions and make *visual predictions* through animation and video. These *visual predictions* could show what would happen to our world's resources and ecosystems if we continue using them up at the rate we are. Students could then use another animation to simulate what would happen if we actually went with their recommendations.

In this type of curriculum, the world becomes students' laboratory and their reason for learning is more real.

And wouldn't it be cool if… the curriculum we taught prepared students for their *today*, their *now*, where walking into any classroom in any school one would witness technology being infused in meaningful ways that engage students in real, non-superficial learning experiences?

What we are up to in educating our students though is not preparing them for their *now* or a *future* of possibilities where proficiency in math, science and technology are essential for success in pursuing a college education or immediately joining a workforce that requires 21st Century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007; see box on next page for more data).

Texas ranks 41 out of 51 in its total score on the *Chance-for-Success*

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Index. For example, and the Governor's Competitiveness Council calls for finding a solution to workforce deficits that exist in key industries (including energy, computer technology, advanced technologies in manufacturing, and aerospace and defense). With this and the cutting off of students to possibilities for themselves and their families, we must move forward with a focused urgency in creating quality curriculum that integrates technology. (Education Research Center, 2008; Stutz, 2008)

For many decades, we have been on a path to technology integration into the curriculum. But, we have yet to realize the dream that the pioneers of technology integration in teaching and learning envisioned. Technology integration at its best has been sporadic even in "technology rich" schools. And because of many factors, it is often viewed as optional and is used at a superficial level.

This is evident in a recent report by the Education Research Center where Texas earned an overall C+ on the State Technology Report Card 2008 (see box) and its technology standards (Technology Applications – Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) are written as a discrete, stand-alone document instead of being embedded in the state content standards.

Traditional thinking about technology has made it more of an "add-on" instead of integral to learning. We need to take the *WIBCI* (pronounced "wib-key") *Wouldn't it be cool if* mentality and embrace a new even more powerful way of thinking where our *students are world-ready* (SAWr).

There are challenges and barriers when integrating technology into curriculum. These challenges encompass teacher stress experienced when there is a lack of fit between the technology demands and teacher knowledge or between availability of supplies and teacher needs, leadership and instructional support, technical support, and resources in terms of hardware and software, and resources in terms of curriculum that specifically details how to create technology-infused, meaningful learning experiences (Al-Fudail and Mellar, 2008; Eteokleous, 2008).

How do we meet these challenges? How do we create a quality curriculum that ensures that our students are world-ready when they leave high school and are prepared for a knowledge-based economy? The pathway to creating technology-enriched, quality curriculum is for new thinking to emerge by paralleling experiences of teachers and students and expanding on our idea of what curriculum is and how it is developed.

Lateral Thinking and Parallel Experiences

We have tried a linear "pile it on top of everything we are already doing" approach when "integrating" technology into content curriculum. So, in addition to teaching math, now a teacher has to teach technology.

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Demands for Knowledge in Math, Science and Technology are Increasing

In its 2006 report, *Are They Really Ready to Work?*, The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management brought forward the reality that "the future competitiveness of the U.S. business community will be dependent on America's ability to produce a highly skilled workforce."

- Only 24 percent of new entrants with four-year college degrees have "excellent" basic knowledge and applied skills and deficiencies exist at every level in important areas of knowledge
- Alarmingly, 42 percent of surveyed employers reported an *overall deficiency* in the preparation of high school graduates
- Of the 400 employers surveyed, 81 percent reported deficiencies in written communications, 70 percent cited deficiencies in professionalism, and 70 percent reported deficiencies in critical thinking.
- Educators were identified by the business community as being the most influential and crucial sector in creating a competitive workforce.

The 10 fastest growing occupations for college graduates by the year 2014 as reported by the College Board and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (http://www.bls.gov) all require proficient knowledge in math, science and technology. Five out of the 10 occupations are jobs directly in technology fields.

The Education Research Center Report Card 2008 reports that Texas earned a C+ rating and is:

- One of 45 states that does not test students on technology,
- One of 25 states that does not have a virtual school, and
- One of 26 states that has stand-alone technology standards that are distinct and separate documents from the content standard.

Compiled by Kathy Brown, Intercultural Development Research Association, 2008.

From the Cradle to College

by Leticia Rodríguez, Ed.M.

In a recent story about an incoming Harvard freshman, one proud parent beamed as she helped her daughter move into the dorm, "I think I'm more excited than my daughter because it's every parent's dream to have their child attending such a prestigious college."

What parent wouldn't be proud! But Ivy League or not, regardless of the college they choose, all students are entitled to receive the same rigorous schooling to help them reach their goals. Early planning, intervention and continual support are essential ingredients to ensure that *all* students have the necessary academic foundations and develop the intellectual curiosity essential for success and graduation from any college.

Following are a few college prep tips teachers, counselors and administrators can share with families to help them navigate the journey from the cradle to college.

For Parents of Infants through Pre-Kindergarten-age Children

Create a family culture for the love of learning. *Explore and engage* – Talk about everything and anything. Find teachable moments in daily activities and events. From early on, shoot the breeze about college.

> **"The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives."**
> **– Robert Hutchins**

Teach self control – Help young children understand their feelings. Give them choices. Find situations to model self-control.

Build self esteem and self confidence – Help children feel successful in their early accomplishments. Provide opportunities for problem solving, persistence and independence.

> **"A good plan executed now is better than a perfect plan next week."**
> **– George Patton**

Read often to infants. The *act* of reading to a young infant is more important than *what* you read. Reading out loud to babies in a cozy and comforting environment helps them to be soothed by the sound of your voice. And, in the future, reading will be associated with warm and happy feelings.

The Texas IDRA PIRC is proud to be working with HIPPY in Texas to support families and their children's learning in this manner. HIPPY is a three-year (90-week) parent involvement and school readiness program in which learning and play go hand-in-hand. Using a structured curriculum, parents encourage their children to recognize shapes and colors, tell stories, follow directions, solve logical problems and acquire other school readiness skills.

Recommended books for infants are: *Good Night Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown, *Touch and Feel Animals* box set from DK Publishing, *Baby Faces* board book, #02: Smile!, by Roberta Grobel Intrater, *Monkey See, Monkey Zoo* from Lamaze Infant Development System, *Barnyard Dance!*, by Sandra Boynton, and *Moo Baa La La La*, also by Sandra Boynton.

Recommended Spanish-language books for infants include: *Leonidas y*

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su perro Luis by Esteban Serrano and Lucia Spotorno, *My Family: Mi famila* series by Pat Mora, *Buenos Dias Baby!* written and illustrated by Libby Ellis, and *Te Amo, Bebe, Little One* by Lisa Wheeler.

Enroll young children in Early Childhood Education programs. Recent longitudinal studies of early childhood development programs indicate that young children, especially economically disadvantaged ones, who participate in well-designed high quality, full-time or half-day, preschool programs demonstrate higher academic achievement and higher high school graduation rates and are more likely to attend college.

High quality early childhood programs also are fundamentally sound human investments that yield extraordinary high public returns. The Federal Bank of Minneapolis and the Federal Bank of Richmond have both recently made recommendations for prioritizing early childhood education as economic development initiatives over subsidizing professional sports stadiums that historically generate a small to negative public return and a negligible impact on reducing crime, increasing earnings and potentially breaking the chain of poverty.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis investigated the cost-benefit of high quality early childhood education programs like the Perry Preschool Program, Abecadarian Project, Chicago Child-Parent Centers and the Elmira Prenatal Early Infancy Project. The results of longitudinal studies on these programs revealed a return ranging from $3 to $9 for every $1 invested.

In addition, the Federal Reserve used a real internal rate of return to adjust for inflation for the Perry School to more easily compare the public as well as private return. The estimate for the real internal rate of return was

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Tools for

Curriculum Quality and Access for Success

A school's curriculum outlines what students who attend the school will learn. A high-quality curriculum is essential to success for all students, which means, it is built on high expectations for students with quality and relevant content, that it effectively incorporates materials and other learning resources like technology, and that it is delivered in a language the student understands. All students must have access to all three elements.

A Snapshot of What IDRA is Doing

Developing leaders – IDRA has been working with teachers in several schools to demonstrate strategies for technology integration. An emphasis is that technology should less be used as a tool for instruction, meaning a way to disseminate information, than as an instructional tool through which students learn to use technology tools while supporting their learning of the content.

Conducting research – IDRA is currently conducting a local evaluation as part of a larger national evaluation to determine the efficacy of two reading programs selected by a group of reading experts based on well-known principles of reading instruction. IDRA is studying one of the 10 school districts in the country. Four high schools in the district were randomly assigned to implement one of two supplemental reading programs. The evaluation will provide researchers, policymakers, school administrators, teachers and parents with important information about the impact of students' learning in both of these comprehensive models and about what works in supporting academic literacy for adolescents in general.

Informing policy – IDRA provided testimony in 2006 as an expertise witness in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas, Tyler Division, Civil Action No. 6:71-CV-5281 involving the provision of appropriate educational programs and equal educational opportunities for limited-English-proficient students. IDRA's testimony focused on the impact of the state's process of aggregating student performance data across grade levels resulting in *district average* scores and on an alternative approach that would apply the same performance criteria at the school (rather than district) level. This past July, Judge William Wayne Justice ruled the Texas Education Agency has violated the civil rights of Spanish-speaking students under the federal *Equal Education Opportunity Act* as state-approved language programs have not improved the performance of secondary students with limited English skills.

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Action

Engaging communities – IDRA's Technology-Enhanced Community Neighborhood Organizations (TECNO) project is working with four community centers located in West Side San Antonio to provide community-based college support to low-income Hispanic and other minority 11th- and 12th-grade students and their families. This project will provide information about college access and help students complete college and financial aid applications. TECNO centers offer direct access and personalized technology support for students, parents and families, resources and information about college access and success, a mentoring system staffed by college students and retired high school and college counselors, support to parents and other non-traditional learners in the community by establishing a bridge between aspirations and access to college, and available resources.

What You Can Do

Get informed. Parents in Texas can review the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to see what their children should be learning each year. Visit **http://www.tea.state.tx.us/teks/#teksbygrade** to view the TEKS, which are available in English for K-12 and in Spanish for grades K-6 in math, science, social studies, English language arts and reading. State standards are public information so parents and communities in any state should request them from their district or state education agency.

Get involved. Teachers' Domain is an online library of classroom resources that include video and audio segments, Flash interactives, images, documents, lesson plans for teachers, and student-oriented activities. Teachers' Domain strives to strengthen teacher knowledge by providing innovative teaching methods that incorporate technology in the classroom and inspire students to learn. Visit **http://www.teachersdomain.org/** for more information.

Get results. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has unveiled its 2008 Educational Technology Standards for Teachers. The new standards "emphasize the need for teachers to facilitate and inspire student learning and creativity, to design and develop digital-age learning experiences and assessments, to model digital-age work and learning, to promote and model digital citizenship and responsibility, and to engage in professional growth and leadership." See the standards at: **http://www.iste.org/Content/NavigationMenu/NETS/ForTeachers/2008Standards/NETS_for_Teachers_2008.htm**.

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at 16 percent! Even when considering arguments based on payments and revenue streams or distribution over time the same result holds. When considered next to other government spending, like subsidizing football and basketball stadiums, investments in early childhood education, especially for economically disadvantaged children, yield higher public as well as private returns.

Save early and often. There is a proverb that says, "Money grows on the tree of patience." This is sage advice to ponder since the average cost of private and public colleges increased by 40 percent from 2000 to 2006.

As daunting as the cost may seem, there are many resources, such as 529 college savings plans, scholarships, work-study programs and grants, to help families finance a college education. All of this financial aid information can be found free of charge on the Internet and from lending institutions and college financial aid offices. Saving early is a good vehicle for offsetting the cost of college, and every little bit saved counts.

For Parents of Elementary and Middle School Students

Learn what children need to know by the end of each school year. In elementary school, parents armed with information about the essential knowledge and skills students need to pass state-mandated and national standards tests can be a valuable asset for high academic performance. For their middle school children, parents can meet with the school guidance counselor to learn about the right courses a student needs to take to stay on the college prep track for high

"Success doesn't come to you…you go to it."
– Marva Collins

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school.

Many middle schools are now following the recommendations from the U.S. Department of Education for Algebra I in eighth grade, geometry in the ninth grade, and each year in English, history or geography, and science. Other recommended middle school courses are visual or drama classes, foreign language, and technology classes.

Read and write together. Read books and more books, magazines, newspapers, the back of cereal boxes and more! Visit the library, record books together or start a mini-library at home.

Help children write letters and cards to family and friends. Young children like writing stories and books. Writing is a tool middle school students can use to connect with their peers. Encourage students to submit their best stories to the school newspaper, literary magazines or writing competitions. There also are web sites that support children's writing, like Tikatok (http://www.tikatok.com/) where children can write and illustrate their stories online.

Help children explore career options based on their interests and assets. Help them dream big.

For Parents of High School Students

Meet with the school guidance counselor to ensure students continue to take challenging and rigorous college prep courses. In recognition of the research that indicates that 80 percent of the jobs of the 21st Century will require a college degree, many states have incorporated more rigorous college readiness standards into high school curricula.

Encourage outside-the-classroom experiences. Volunteering, mentoring, hobbies and work experiences are the building blocks necessary to reinforce interpersonal and leadership skills for school and college admission and success.

Encourage girls as well as boys to participate in sports. Many female executives attribute their success in Corporate America to the leadership skills they learned on softball fields and basketball courts. Likewise, many CEOs and U.S. presidents credit their extraordinary success in life to the leadership skills they gained as Eagle Scouts.

> **"Nine tenths of education is encouragement."**
> **– Anatole France**

Research and participate in pre-college programs. Numerous college preparatory programs, such as Upward Bound, GEAR-UP, Project Stay and POSSE, recruit first-generation college bound students. Many of these provide students with comprehensive guidance, support and information on college applications, financial aid, college admissions tests, college tours, summer college camps and parent involvement. Check with school administrators and guidance counselors for the availability of pre-college programs at the school campus.

Plan visits to college campuses – including virtual tours. Many colleges provide tours on Saturdays. Look at college web sites for everything families want to know about colleges but are afraid or don't know to ask. Many colleges have interactive sites with video of campus life and activities.

Attend local college fairs and contact local college alumni groups for more specific information about colleges of interest. Prior to attending a college fair, students can prepare general questions for the college recruiters, such as graduation rates, concentrations and majors, financial aid and scholarships, extracurricular activities and housing requirements.

When colleges are short on staff for college fairs, college alumni often volunteer to recruit at the fairs. These alums, especially recent grads, are a rich source of information for students and families. They are usually the most active members of the local alumni groups and are eager to provide information about their colleges. Many alumni clubs, such as The Texas Exes of San Antonio Chapter (https://www.texasexes.org) and Harvard Club of San Antonio (http://clubs.harvard.edu), have school committees that sponsor early college awareness activities. Visit these and other alumni web sites for contact information and early college awareness activities.

Develop student-mentor relationships. Encourage your child to initiate a genuine relationship with his or her favorite teacher, coach, youth group sponsor, scout leader or other school leader. Each of these adults can provide life-long guidance and valuable recommendations for college or work.

Develop soft skills. Infuse them into children's education along with academics. In today's economy, policy and business leaders are

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- **Links to precollege programs**
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Strategies for Increasing Student Engagement Across the School

Student engagement is the relationship a student has with all aspects of the school. Here are some strategies identified by research for increasing student engagement at the schoolwide level.

- Establish the school as a community. (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007)
- Provide opportunities for participation. (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007)
- Ensure there are significant adults in the school who support and advocate for each student and his or her family. These adults should provide "continuity of care" throughout the years students are in the school. (Connell and Klem, 2004)
- Set up small learning communities. (Connell and Klem, 2004)
- Use data to inform and determine effective strategies within a specific school system, such as:
  - Support student-faculty communication,
  - Encourage cooperation among students,
  - Use active learning strategies,
  - Set high expectations for all students, and
  - Respect diverse talents and ways of learning. (Bridges, et al., 2005)
- Create an ethos culture that connects students to the larger group by:
  - creating a shared vision,
  - having students co-create in the culture,
  - ensuring students are oriented into the school culture,
  - listening to the students,
  - listening to the community about students,
  - building relationships among students, and
  - building relationships between students and faculty. (Kezar, 2007)

Compiled by K. Grayson, Intercultural Development Research Association, 2008.

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threatened and withdrawing from challenges.

A similar study was conducted at the college level. It sheds light on the concept of student engagement from a systems level. As reported in the article, "Student Engagement at Minority-Serving Institutions: Emerging Lessons from the BEAMS Project," there is a great need to use triangulation of data to define the institutional practices that impact successful student engagement and help students achieve and stay in school until completion of their degree program (Bridges, et al., 2005).

Researchers advocate for data to be used to build and support institutional structures that promote engagement. Data also should lead faculty to take specific actions for transformational changes. Their review of the literature shows that organizational student engagement is based on seven principles, including "student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning" (Bridges, et al., 2005).

Another study conducted at the university level is the Documenting Effective Educational Practices (DEEP) project. In this project, student engagement is found to relate to the theory of *ethos*, the creation of a culture that connects individuals to a group.

Kezar (2007) reports on the project by describing successful campuses that have employed certain strategies, such as building a shared vision and understanding, students co-creating in the group culture, orientations and activities that include students in the culture of the school, listening to students and the community about students, and building relationships among students and between students and faculty.

IDRA has developed the Quality Schools Action Framework that details a schema for systems change in schools that includes student engagement as a key element. School-level indicators are delineated as parent and community engagement, student engagement, teaching quality, and

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curriculum quality and access. While diagramed as discrete elements, it is easy to see from the research on systemwide student engagement that all of these components are connected and intertwined. Each school indicator enhances the other dimensions, and none exists without the other.

Research on student engagement at the level of school systems can be the lens with which to focus on quality schools that provide an equitable education that leads to academic success.

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Highlights of Recent IDRA Activities

In June and July, IDRA worked with **9,818** teachers, administrators, parents and higher education personnel through **48** training and technical assistance activities and **155** program sites in **12** states plus Brazil. Topics included:

- Creating a Literacy Rich Environment for Young Children
- Early Literacy Development for Spanish Speakers
- Teaching American History Grant Evaluation
- Curriculum Development and Staff Development in Math

Activity Snapshot

In a major urban school district in southeast Texas plagued by racial tension, hostility and violence, the equity assistance center South Central Collaborative for Equity quickly assessed the situation and context; interviewed and surveyed key forces in the district including administrators, teachers, parents and students; and articulated a clear and appropriate response to the problem. Part of that response included bringing together the different key stakeholders and helping them to realize the effects that tension, hostility and violence were having on children. Through our collective work in dialogues, effective decision making and problem solving, they transformed their own school environment.

Participating agencies and school districts included:

- Northside Independent School District (ISD), Texas
- Louisiana State Department of Education, Louisiana
- Houston ISD, Texas
- Education Service Center, Region 17, Texas

Regularly, IDRA staff provides services to:

- public school teachers
- parents
- administrators
- other decision makers in public education

Services include:

- training and technical assistance
- evaluation
- serving as expert witnesses in policy settings and court cases
- publishing research and professional papers, books, videos and curricula

For information on IDRA services for your school district or other group, contact IDRA at 210-444-1710.

How are the Students Doing? More than Test Scores!

Title I Accountability and Attrition Studies

IDRA published the first Texas public school attrition study for the 1985-86 school year. Every year since then, we have published the attrition rates for the whole state. It took quite a while for our findings to be accepted broadly, but now it is common knowledge that schools are losing many, many students and that schools are not holding on to and educating a large number of students.

Today, the state and our schools are being held much more accountable under the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Yet a more comprehensive and accurate picture of how a school is doing must have a framework that considers governance efficacy, appropriate resources, parent and family engagement, student engagement, teaching quality, and access to quality curriculum. Even as official reports still fudge on numbers because of the many leaver codes and attempts to classify the disappearing populations in ways that do not seem as indicting, the fact is: we are not educating large segments of the school-age population. And we will pay for it, clearly.

Title I requires that schools give parents a report card on how they are doing in educating students. If in Texas we are losing almost one in two Latino students and almost one in three African American students, the grade is 50 on a 100-point scale for Latino students and a 66 for African American students. If 70 is considered passing, we are failing. IDRA calls for a response at the systems level that strengthens school holding power, since schools are the locus and focus of responsibility.

The most common interpretation of accountability, and the leading and most public indicator, has been the student scores on state-required exams (which are currently high-stakes exams). Yet, if we really want to hold our schools accountable, we need to also look at a school holding power index. What is the score on how our schools are managing to hold on to their students through high school graduation?

It is obviously equally important that we have much more information. We need to know more information about our students, like…

- Are they preparaed for post-secondary education?
- Do they understand the many possibilities available for their professional future?
- Do they have technological and Internet proficiency?
- Is their development of skills and interests giving them insight into their unique gifts and talents?
- Are they ready to work hard for those things that will prepare them for the world of work and their lives as citizens and community members?

Parent Information and Resource Center activities with families have included presenting information online that speaks to the elements of IDRA's Quality Schools Action Framework:

- **Fair Funding**
- **Governance Efficacy**
- **Parent and Community Engagement**
- **Student Engagement**
- **Teaching Quality**
- **Curriculum Quality and Access**

In one example, through the *IDRA Newsletter* and our Classnotes podcast, we have shared how one group of high school parents surveyed parents and students about math instruction and student achievement at their school.

Our children, at a very minimum, must complete a full high school course of study. Title I school requirements, both letter and spirit, are important. Schools must hold on to students through high school graduation.

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Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., is an IDRA senior education associate and director of the Texas IDRA Parent Information and Resource Center. He also serves on the national board of PTA. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Please fill out our survey . . .

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Go to www.idra.org and take 3 minutes to complete the survey.

Thank you!

Integrating Technology *– continued from Page 4*

We need to think laterally instead of linearly. There is great promise that can be achieved through lateral thinking.

Integrating technology is sometimes overwhelming because we think this means that the teacher must know every technology tool that is out there. But it is more about knowing the *types* of technologies, their uses and relationships to creating a world-ready student. It is about orchestrating the learning experiences and tools that result in building knowledge.

With the emergence of new technologies coming into play every day and the Internet transforming how we communicate and collaborate via Web 2.0 social media tools, it becomes imperative that we adopt a new way of thinking that encourages *lateral thinking* at its core.

Lateral thinking is a term that describes a "set of approaches and techniques designed to find radically new approaches to problems – to come at them from the side rather than the front" (Sloane, 2003). To be innovative, one has to implement a creative idea that is focused on the goals. This means taking a risk and having the creative space and the leadership support to take these risks in a classroom. It is in this state of innovation that we learn and refine continuously and look for new ways of achieving the goal of preparing students who are world-ready.

We need new approaches to integrating technology into the curriculum. Bringing together creative and lateral thinking techniques will result in transformations in how we integrate technology, teach and learn.

Parallel experiences for teachers and leaders will provide a pathway to these lateral approaches. If one has never experienced a technology-infused learning experience that is required for a 21st Century learner as outlined in the National Educational Standards (ISTE, 2007 and 2008) and the Framework for 21st Century Skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007), then how can one create these learning experiences? It would be like expecting someone to teach a child how to ride a bike and all of the skills necessary to ride an 18-speed (fitting the bike, balancing, shifting gears, pedaling, thinking and looking ahead, etc.) when the "teacher" has never ridden or even seen a fully assembled bike. The teacher may have learned about some parts of the bike and may have used one or two pieces but has never ridden one.

Teachers' parallel experiences play a critical role in the development of quality curriculum. Teachers are the implementers of curriculum and should participate in the process to realize the full potential of technology in learning and building knowledge (Eteokleous, 2008). A strong, quality curriculum stems from a community of learners and practice, reducing stress associated with technology integration and bringing together examples of student work and lessons (Al-Fudail and Mellar, 2008; Boss, 2008).

Equitable Access to Quality Curriculum and Instruction

The development and implementation process also must be such that *all* students gain access to quality curriculum and instruction to ensure equity. One concern is the Digital Divide that is present *within* schools, where some students have access to technology and technology-

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enriched lessons and others do not, depending on whose class they are enrolled in and if that teacher integrates technology as an "add-on" or on a daily basis (O'Neal, 2007). This also is true if the student is a "good student" and gets the assignment done early or is seen as a tech-savvy student who gets to connect the cables and run the computer.

This is not to say that lessons should be scripted; technology allows for dynamic solutions and dynamic instruction. However, it is imperative that *all* students have access to curriculum and instruction that does the following (The Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2007; Sloane, 2003; Marshall, 2006).

- Provides pathways to innovative, creative and lateral thinking.
- Connects across content areas, interdisciplinary studies, 21st Century skills and real-world contexts with a focus on teaching for understanding.
- Blends various types of technologies in non-prescribed ways.
- Integrates research-based teaching strategies that foster 21st Century skills (project-based learning, problem-based learning, cooperative learning, problem-solving, inquiry-based learning, etc.).
- Is a dynamic guide on what to teach and how to teach it in a way that teachers contribute through online collaborative tools that model collective knowledge building and where they reflect on teaching practice and creating curriculum units.
- Connects to experts around the world, especially in the new technologies, sciences and areas that are being developed (i.e., nanotechnology).

Include Student Voice

Technology is a tool that our students use with such ease and finesse; it is imperative that we include student voice in the development of quality curriculum. This helps meet the goals of preparing world-ready students and of overcoming challenges in creating relevant and engaging learning experiences. Students blend technologies very naturally. It is innate and at the same time complex thinking that our students do with such elegance and efficiency.

Students as "contributors and co-creators of quality curriculum" shifts the concept of learning from one that is top-down to one that is collaborative with the teacher as facilitator. It makes the curriculum organic and alive. By learning and implementing the curriculum alongside students, teacher stress is reduced, but more importantly, teachers are modeling for students a crucial skill: the skill of "life-long" learning. It would be most awesome to see teachers, students and experts as co-creators and co-learners.

There are many implications when moving toward a quality curriculum that integrates technology in ways where the WIBCIs (*Wouldn't it be cool ifs)* that have been sporadic move to a continuous stream of meaningful learning experiences where students are world-ready (SAWr) to pursue a college education or join the workforce. Through a process that integrates creative and lateral thinking approaches, parallels learning experiences of teachers and students, ensures equitable access and includes student voice, we have the tools necessary to create new possibilities and realities for all our students.

Wouldn't it be cool if… we all took these suggestions and followed through with this call for urgency right now?

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From the Cradle *– continued from Page 8*

saying: "Young people must also be able to work comfortably with people from other cultures, solve problems creatively, write and speak well, think in a multidisciplinary way, and evaluate information critically. And they need to be punctual, dependable and industrious." (Gewertz, 2007)

A 2007 College Board study revealed that, over a lifetime, a college graduate has the potential to earn $800,000 more than a person with only a high school diploma. College graduates also are reported to generally be more optimistic, knowledgeable of world affairs and healthier. So despite the initial financial sticker shock of obtaining a college education, the short-term investments are minimal compared to the long-term benefits derived by the individual and our communities.

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